

Lincoln, NE — Congressman Jeff Fortenberry hosted an official field hearing of the House Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Nutrition in Lincoln on Wednesday. The hearing, entitled "Addressing the 'Health' in Health Care: Nutrition, Prevention, and Wellness Practices," explored the cost savings and best practices of good nutrition, including fresh, locally raised foods, prevention, and wellness initiatives and featured expert testimony from regional and national business and health care executives as well as research scientists. Congressman Joe Baca (D-CA), chairman of the subcommittee, and Congressman Fortenberry, ranking member, led the hearing.

Congressman Fortenberry's opening statement follows. Click [here](#) to see a list of the hearing witnesses and read their testimonies.

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Jeff Fortenberry
Department Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry Subcommittee
Field Hearing: Addressing the 'Health' in Health Care:
Nutrition, Prevention, and Wellness Practices
August 5, 2009**

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today, and for honoring me by traveling to my home state of Nebraska, to Nebraska's 1st Congressional District, to review this important issue of health and wellness. I appreciate your commitment to these issues, and the sacrifice of your time over recess to be here. I would like everyone here to know that Chairman Baca has been serving in the U.S. Congress since 1999 as the Representative of the 43rd district of California, in Southern California. He is the Chairman of this Agriculture Subcommittee on Departmental Operations, Oversight, Nutrition and Forestry, and I am the Ranking Member. I would like to point out that Chairman Baca formerly served in the U.S. Army as a paratrooper from 1966-1968. Following his military service, he earned a degree in sociology from California State University-Los Angeles, and then for 15 years worked in community relations with General Telephone and Electric. He has served in both the California State Assembly and the State Senate. Thank you, Chairman Baca, for being here today.

I also want to thank Marsha Lommel, CEO of Madonna Proactive, for allowing us to hold this hearing here on the Madonna premises today. It is a privilege to enjoy your facility for this important purpose, and your hospitality is much appreciated.

I also wish to express my appreciation to each of the witnesses who invested their time to be here, and who will be sharing their expertise on this important subject. I look forward to today's discussion.

Throughout the country, we are engaged in a very important debate about the direction of our nation's health care system. This debate is critical to the well-being of families, small businesses and all Americans. Our deliberations must be thoughtful and center on two essential questions: how do we improve health care outcomes and reduce costs, while protecting vulnerable persons?

One important piece of the solution is to understand that a major driver of our ever-increasing health care costs is the rise of chronic diseases. We are seeing an epidemic of chronic diseases across this country. Public health statistics and economic data show that 75% of all health care spending is related in some way to treating lifestyle-related chronic conditions. Seven out of every 10 deaths in this country are caused by a chronic condition, and the top 4 killers are heart disease, diabetes, cancer and strokes. These are largely lifestyle-related diseases. They could be prevented, better managed, and in some cases, even reversed through healthy lifestyle changes.

But, according to recent statistics, the average American is now 23 pounds overweight. Obesity among young people has tripled since 1980. Obesity is a major risk factor that leads to the onset of these chronic conditions.

As a result, it is imperative that our health care system promote and incentivize healthy nutrition practices and wellness. We must foster a culture of wellness, and reward behaviors that reduce the onset of these diseases. I believe billions of dollars could be saved if we reduced, or at least delayed, their onset. And as responsible individuals and citizens, I hope we will personally implement wellness and preventive measures that can reduce our risk factors for these conditions. Similarly, I support a paradigm shift in our practice of medicine. In this country, we pay doctors to fix, cut and prescribe. It is time we pay doctors to prevent.

It is also for this reason that we gather at this hearing today. As the ranking member of this subcommittee, I am personally committed to exploring ways to encourage good nutrition habits and wellness principles, and to promote policies that support chronic disease prevention efforts.

I am eager to hear our experts from across the state and the Midwest speak on these topics, as well as hear their suggestions as to what is working and what could be duplicated throughout the country, to promote a culture of wellness and chronic disease prevention.

Again, Mr. Chairman, it is a privilege to have you in Nebraska's 1st Congressional District, and I thank you for holding this hearing. I look forward to the insights that our witnesses will provide on this topic.

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